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by Pierre-Henri Simon

Laforgue's Despairing Humor
by Vivian Mercier

Poet of Our Youth
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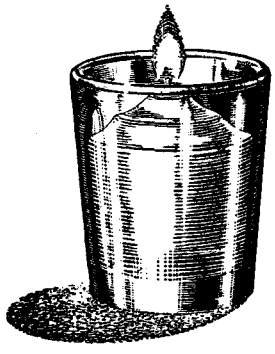

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Editor
EDWARD S. SKILLIN

Managing Editor
JAMES O'GARA

Associate Editors
JAMES FINN
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JOHN C. CORT
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PHILIP T. HARTUNG
RICHARD HAYES

JOHN BRUBAKER: *Advertising Manager*

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THE
Commonweal
A Weekly Review of Public Affairs, Literature, and the Arts
THIRTY-THIRD YEAR OF PUBLICATION

week by week

POWER AND INFLUENCE

THE DECISION which Congress takes regarding funds for the United States Information Agency will have a significance beyond the Agency itself. Buried under the mass of controversy surrounding the proposed budget lies a question which has plagued each Administration since the second world war: how can the United States, so suddenly thrust into prominence as the leading Western power, most effectively employ its strength and influence in our present divided world? How can it best oppose Communism, aid its allies, protect its own interests, and gain the confidence of the neutral countries?

That it should pursue the course suggested by these questions is evident. The problem our nation faces is not one of ends, but of the means to achieve a generally accepted goal. The most trenchant criticism of the present Administration, for instance, is not that it lacks a policy toward the world, but that it lacks particular policies for the separate problems that are encountered. Because of this, it is argued with strong justification, we have too often lost particular struggles with the Communists, we have alienated allies, we have endangered or impaired our own interests, we have confused and disappointed struggling peoples behind the Iron Curtain, and we have failed to win over the uncommitted countries.

The United States has been criticized by friends, enemies and neutrals because of specific actions the Administration and the State Department thought necessary. Some of this criticism was justified in that our policies were proved ineffective. Other criticisms were justified in that they represented clear differences of opinion. Even between the closest of nations some differences are inevitable and one must expect to live with them. The profound differences between the United States and Russia will, of course, be revealed in deep struggle and opposition. And the neutral countries will often resent the two polar powers between which they maintain their existence.

But even the State Department complains, often with a bewildered air, that the United States meets with unwarranted and unnecessary criticism abroad. It is unwarranted because it is based on misunderstanding and prejudice, unnecessary because we have the means to clear up much of the misunderstanding and to dissipate the prejudice. One of the agencies formed to do just this is the United States Information Agency.

THE U.S.I.A. is an independent organization under the Executive branch of the government. It operates in eighty-two foreign nations or territories. It disseminates information concerning the United States, its policies and purposes by broadcasting, among many programs, the Voice of America, by operating information centers and libraries, by furnishing material to press services around the world, and by preparing movies about life in the U.S. It tries to counteract Communist propaganda and to emphasize the positive aspects of United States policies. With both sophisticated and illiterate audiences it attempts to explain on an ideological level what our foreign policy is intended to accomplish. It attempts to influence both the leaders and ordinary citizens of various countries.

The need of such an organization would seem to be evident beyond discussion. Yet in its attempts to cut the budget Congress has proposed that funds for the U.S.I.A. be reduced twenty-six per cent. And this proposal has been greeted enthusiastically by some political commentators and editors. The arguments they advance have the merit of strong

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feeling, but little substance. The Brooklyn *Tablet*, for instance, carried an editorial which was typical of those which oppose the U.S.I.A. Although it would seem obvious that a good native spokesman might have more effect in his country than an American, the *Tablet* complained of the number of foreigners employed by the U.S.I.A. It also complained that "trying to tell our international friends what Americans think America is like" might well irritate them. The alternative, it appears, is to let others, including Communists, spread the good word about us. Lodged between these two curious arguments is an attack upon the waste and inefficiency of the U.S.I.A. Here the *Tablet* makes sound criticism. But, considering the importance and accomplishments of the U.S.I.A., the alternative to inefficiency is not dissolution of the Agency but greater efficiency.

If the United States is to be as influential as it is powerful, it must intensify the ideological struggle against Communism. As limited as it is, the U.S.I.A. is an important agent in this struggle. We cannot rely entirely on official pronouncements and armed forces to influence other nations. We must employ and extend throughout the world a knowledge of those ideas which we endeavour to maintain. The vote of Congress on funds for the U.S.I.A. will be one indication of how seriously it regards ideological struggle in the cold war.

FAR-FLUNG DEFENSES

TWO MORE unlikely places for drawing a line in the interests of national defense could hardly be imagined than the kingdoms of Laos and Jordan. The former is 13,000 miles away and was until recently a part of French Indochina. It is small in extent, and numbers but a million and a half people. But its position could hardly be more strategic. Communist China is to the north and Communist North Vietnam to the northeast, while Thailand extends along most of its western border and Cambodia is to the south. Already the two northern states of Laos have been infiltrated by Vietnam Communists. If Laos should fall, Thailand, Cambodia and South Vietnam would be in immediate peril. Further, the way would lie open for the Communists to descend upon the Malay Peninsula and the wealth of the shaky East Indies. That is why the United States, France and Great Britain at this time deem it necessary to assert their support of the integrity of this remote kingdom.

Much as Laos is at present a key to the defense of Southeast Asia, so the maintenance of the endangered kingdom of Jordan is essential for the Middle East. The oil of the whole region is all-important to Europe and the West. If Jordan should go Communist and/or be divided up between Egypt and Syria, the Soviet Union could almost certainly count on control of a highly strategic "land-bridge" between Asia and North Africa; only Turkish territory would stand in the way of a clear sweep down to the Mediterranean from the Soviet Union itself. Regardless of that, the fighting over Jordan's remains might well lead to World War III, a war of nuclear weapons.

If the reasons for maintaining Jordan's independence at the present are so compelling, the obstacles are enormous. Jordan has practically no history and no tradition, going back at most to 1921 when the British created Transjordan. The more numerous Palestinians, who were added to the kingdom in 1949 after the Israeli war, are of doubtful loyalty to King Hussein. Much of this artificially-set-up buffer land is desert. The kingdom is so poor that it cannot afford to pay its own troops. When Britain withdrew its subsidies last year, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria agreed to contribute the sums needed, but only the former has fully complied; the latter two have actually been plotting Hussein's downfall.

To the intensity of Arab nationalism now characteristic of Jordan's Moslem neighbors must be added the resentment of the Jordanians over the Palestine refugees whose flight or expulsion from their homes and farmlands—and their years of exile in refugee camps—is blamed primarily on the United States, as a supporter of Israel. The Richards mission, explaining the Eisenhower Doctrine in the Middle East, is not welcome. American aid under the Doctrine is not now politically feasible.

Yet Communist agitation continues vehement in a land which appears neither politically nor economically viable, and Egyptian and Syrian agents, with whom young King Hussein has been dealing so decisively, have still to be contended with. That is why the financial and military assistance of King Saud of Saudi Arabia and of Hussein's cousin, King Feisal of Iraq, is of such paramount importance. King Hussein may be very grateful for the Sixth Fleet's presence nearby; but he cannot request armed help unless his extreme difficulties become even more acute—he must for the present even indulge in certain anti-American gestures.

The need for defending these key bastions, complicated as it is, shows how far the American defense horizon has widened.

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MR. EISENHOWER AND THE RIGHT-WING

ONE OF THE Republican Senators who faces a primary fight next year is William E. Jenner of Indiana. As almost everyone knows by now, Senator Jenner has long been a key man in the far-right wing of the G.O.P., consistently joining men like Senator McCarthy of Wisconsin and Senator Malone of Nevada in a die-hard opposition to the Administration. At a recent press conference newsmen tried to get Mr. Eisenhower to commit himself on his attitude toward Republicans like Senator Jenner. This time, as in the past when similar questions have come up, the President sidestepped the issue very adroitly. Whether or not he will support Senator Jenner in the 1958 election is an academic question, he indicated, since the Senator first has to win in the Republican primaries. Left up in the air was the big question: will the White House use its influence in an effort to defeat Senator Jenner and other right-wing Republicans in G.O.P. primaries? Or will Mr. Eisenhower be strictly neutral when right-wing candidates face Eisenhower Republicans?

These questions, and the situation that underlies them, pose a real problem for Mr. Eisenhower. No matter which course he intends to follow, we think he is quite right in not spelling it out ahead of time for the press. But can and should he do anything in situations like this? We do not know, and Mr. Eisenhower's advisers probably do not either. Intervention from Washington is often resented by local voters, and might well result in a huge plurality for the selected target. Yet President Eisenhower knows full well that men like Senators Jenner, McCarthy and Malone do not just disagree with him on this or that specific point, as men of good will and common aims often do. They disagree fundamentally and completely with his view of the modern world and of the role of the Republican party. And, unfortunately, their spirit seems to be spreading, as is evident in current discussions of the budget.

Many people have predicted that the President's influence inside his party would decline sharply during his second term because he is barred from running again. Some months back, we expressed our doubts that things would work out this way. Today we are not at all so sure; we are just about ready to concede that the pessimists were more right on this point than we were. Mr. Eisenhower's program is in serious trouble, and much of it is coming from his fellow-Republicans, ranging from Senators Jenner, McCarthy and Malone to Knowland, Bridges and Goldwater. It is hard to say how Mr. Eisenhower should deal with them, but we do know that in the contest our sympathies are with the President.

IN PLACE OF COLONIALISM?

IMPERIALISM and the demands of business have enjoyed a lion's share of the blame for recent wars. No doubt a peak was reached in the much documented theory that the weapons merchants themselves directly brought on World War I for profit. Year after year this country has had to face the charge of dollar diplomacy round the world. Suspicion of the world trader is widespread.

This supplies some background for the resentment of the British over our hurrying them out of their colonies in the past decade. It is reflected in the London *Tablet,* a Catholic weekly which stood virtually alone among Conservative publications in its condemnation of its government's decision to descend upon Suez. A recent editorial declares that "it would be unfortunate if what happened in Asia was repeated in Africa, and American political and commercial representatives, combining idealism and business, sought to hasten the end of European rule . . . only to find . . . the universal enfranchisement of people without education or property qualifications leads directly to cheering mobs surging around the demagogues who nationalize foreign property. . . ." The *Tablet* cites Latin America to show that "American business will support any kind of military ruler who can provide the first essentials of public order and tranquility." Is this not a rather telling way of challenging this nation's ultimate consistency?

FEDERAL SCHOOL-AID

THE PRESIDENT'S proposal for federal school-construction aid is languishing still in committee. It will probably not even be considered by the Congress until other, even more controversial legislation, like the civil-rights program, is dealt with. And if and when the bill does get onto the floor of Congress, it will undoubtedly meet a ferocious reception at the hands of the economy axwielders. This unfortunate combination of parliamentary circumstance and the drive to cut the President's $71.8 billion budget may mean that no federal school-support will be forthcoming for another year at least.

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If this were not discouraging enough for those who support the President's bill, there are other worries, too. Federal assistance in local school-construction is being attacked on other grounds. Critics of the school bill say that federal aid will mean federal control, that free education will be lost, that our schools will become mere indoctrination-centers for beliefs prescribed by an all-powerful state.

These representations are frightening, indeed, but they bear little relation to the facts. Governmental thought-control and educational conformity are not the automatic results of federal help in school-construction; they are hardly even possible results.

The fear of government domination as inevitably coupled with government support makes some sense when it refers to private colleges and universities, although it is even here a matter for debate. But when this fear carries over to the case of elementary and secondary schools, which are public schools to begin with, it is absurd. All public schools are government-supported; most states assist town and city school programs, with state funds; and even now the federal government is assisting local programs to the extent of millions of dollars a year. Federal or even state domination has not been automatic up to now.

A large-scale effort to extend and repair the American public school plant is urgently needed, and soaring costs and the overnight mushrooming of communities have made it impossible for communities to meet this need themselves. President Eisenhower believes, and we agree, that the federal government has the responsibility to assist the citizens of the various states in their need, and to make funds available to build schools for their children. This is not a simple matter, and there are many problems involved. But let us deal with the real problems, and not imaginary totalitarian grade schools.

PROTECTING UNION FUNDS

THE PRESIDENT has urged Congressional action to protect rank-and-file union members from abuse by their own officers of health and welfare funds, which now amount to somewhere between twenty-five and thirty billion dollars. His recent statement on the matter was made after consultation with James P. Mitchell, his Secretary of Labor, so Mr. Mitchell obviously approves, and he added a further proposal that much wider publicity be given to union financial statements. The unions favor such measures and had even suggested previously that the Administration bills pending in Congress be made more inclusive. Then after Mr. Eisenhower issued his statement, Mr. George Meany of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. called in the press to emphasize his own agreement with the President. Union officials and members, political leaders, clergymen, editors—almost everyone seems to favor the proposed legislation. Such near-unanimity is very seldom found, and it now remains only for Congress to make it complete.

THE POET

A NOTE OF COMBINED literary-cultural-political interest was furnished by a recent issue of the N.Y. *Times Magazine*. It seems that Mao-Tse-tung, the Chinese Communist leader, has been for many years a poet as well as a political strong man and soldier. Mao has at last permitted some of his poems to be published, in a Peiping magazine, and the *Times* has reproduced a selection from them.

Ignorance of the form and the tradition which produced it renders us incompetent to pronounce on the poems as poems, but certain things about them are obvious. Some of the poems are propagandistic, but mostly they are not "new style"; that is, they are not "socialist-realist," they are not collectivist, they are not written in the new colloquial language. Their author has chosen to use the ancient, stylized form of descriptive-lyric verse and the ancient, stylized literary language of China. His poems, for the most part, are delicate little songs in celebration of private feelings.

Everything about these poems runs counter to official Communist doctrine. Mao-Tse-tung himself seems aware of this and includes with the poems an apologetic note: ". . . they represent an antique style of expression and I am afraid of sowing a wrong seed . . . the new style should of course be the trend to follow." And yet the poems, in all their traditionalist, personalist decadence, have been published in a Communist state, by a Communist leader.

Perhaps too much should not be made of this, but at any rate we are glad to see Mao's poems. They remind us that he is a man like us, and whatever else we may think of him, in days to come, we will think of him, too, as the author of lines like this:

With my winecup
I make an offering
to the ever flowing waters.
My heart is as full as the rising river.

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The Literature of Guilt

"RARELY HAS THE FIELD OF LETTERS BEEN MORE PREOCCUPIED BY THE PROBLEMS OF THE HUMAN CONSCIENCE THAN IT IS TODAY"

PIERRE-HENRI SIMON

DURING PERIODS of crisis, when cultural values and the very principles of the structure of society are questioned, it is natural that feelings of personal responsibility, attended by anxiety, frustration and remorse, should lead to uneasy consciences and then to feelings of guilt. An obsession of general guilt tends to follow: the individual feels that he is immersed in it and seeks to escape in order to save his interior balance—yet, if he should yield to the impulsion of some psychic disorder or moral weakness, he finally acquiesces in that guilt.

Of this state of mind many symptoms could be mentioned, but we may limit ourselves to those observable in present-day literature. Rarely has the field of letters been more serious in its themes, graver in tone, more preoccupied by the problems of the human conscience, than it is today. There is good reason for regarding these works of art as human and social documents.

One theme which occurs frequently is the refusal of individual happiness—a rejection inspired by an intense pity for the suffering and misery of others. In *La Sauvage* by Anouilh, the heroine is confronted by a love which is pure and genuinely reciprocated, one that would miraculously deliver her from the humiliation of a life of squalor and shame. But in the end she cannot bring herself to pass over into the camp of those fortunate ones who, through their material wealth, are able to keep up their self-respect. She refuses to give up her solidarity with the unfortunate and the oppressed and runs away, her little valise in her hand: "There will always be a lost dog somewhere who will keep me from being happy."

In the preface to *Dieu le savait,* in 1954, Salacrou confessed to the public that from his earliest years he had been obsessed by the problem of evil, injustice, the suffering of the innocents. As an adolescent he had encountered—in the Latin version of Tacitus—the frightful story of the daughter of Sejanus, who was violated in prison and then strangled by the command of the Emperor Tiberius; the voice of this child crying out in her fright and her innocence, which he had never stopped hearing deep within, became for him the symbol of man's protest against the cruelty of fate, and it has echoed loudly in his dramatic works.

There is another outcry, that of the desperate wayfarer whom Clamence, the narrator of *The Fall,* saw throwing herself from a bridge into the Seine. This cry became the strident laughter of an irony which robbed him of his peace and no longer permitted him to sleep with the false good conscience of an honest citizen.

Well before *The Fall,* the intuition of an empire of violence and unhappiness for which every individual is responsible, in so far as he countenances it, was at the heart of the humanism of Camus: *The Stranger,* in rejecting society; *Sisyphus,* in defying the universe; the author of the *Letter to a German Friend* taking the side of justice for men as opposed to the injustice of the gods. All these served as a prelude to the basic affirmation of *The Plague*: "I know from sources which cannot be questioned that everyone carries the plague within himself, because no one, no, no one in the world is undamaged by it—and that we must watch ourselves unceasingly in order not to be led, in a moment of distraction, to breathe into the face of another and thereby infect him with this dread disease. Germs are concomitants of nature . . . that is why I have decided always to take the part of the victims in order to limit the harm that would be done."

Camus and Sartre disagree about the respective merits of the rebel and the revolutionary: Camus distrusts the revolutionary who builds another State, another police, another tyranny; Sartre, on the other hand, scoffs at the rebel who, in order to remain absolutely pure, walls himself up in the ineffectuality of a metaphysical protest. But both agree with a whole school, the most characteristic one in the literature of our day, on a fundamental point; conscious of the disorder in the world and of the evils of society, man is not fully human and cannot claim to play a useful role in the world unless he abandons the attitude of rejection. This implies an original feeling of guilt, of willing participation in the cosmic and historical disorder, of being poisoned by osmosis.

M. Simon, who has taught at various European universities, is a French poet and novelist.

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IN QUITE another philosophic context there is the case of Simone Weil. Others will correct me, if need be, when I interpret the hesitation of this naturally and supernaturally Christian soul to cross the threshold into the Church as a kind of sorrowful refusal to enter upon the comfort of the elect, considering the misery of those under condemnation, as a scruple of a charity which is heroic to a paradoxical degree, refusing to break off contact and solidarity with the world of shame and affliction. Moreover, her predilection for the proletariat seems to reflect her need for communion with a portion of humanity which is less culpable, if not wholly innocent, because it is a victim and not a fomenter of injustice. Such an attitude is recognizable in Marx and those who seek to link up the humanist tradition with Marxism—Jaurès, for example, who sought to perceive in the humiliated and suffering proletariat the redemptive innocence of the world, the Christ of mankind. An analogous idea had already found expression in Dostoevsky.

In all these examples we arrive at a feeling of collective guilt on an almost metaphysical level. Evil is understood as a universal law. It appears linked either with nature, or at least with the human condition, and it seems to be a kind of secular transposition of the theology of sin. We are all sinners, not only because we are all weak and guilty of some misdeeds, but more universally in that we are children of sin, infected with selfishness and untruthfulness, even in our virtuous acts, and immersed, as it were in spite of ourselves, in evil. But the feeling of guilt comes to take on more precise and more positive forms: it presents itself as a feeling of responsibility for collective sins which are historically focused in a certain social group, and for which we are responsible, not metaphysically but morally, in so far as we are members of such a group. In this perspective I should like to present a few symptoms of three forms of the tormented conscience that is now very much with us: that of class, of nation and of culture.

The guilty conscience of a class refers today, one might say exclusively, to the bourgeoisie. Doubtless this is because the civilization which gives us our sustenance continues to be intrinsically bourgeois in its structure as well as in the values it cherishes. It is bourgeois philosophers whose consciences are troubled by these weaknesses and these perils. And present-day literature is still written in large part by and for the bourgeois themselves. For these reasons the bourgeoisie seems to have been given over, especially during the last thirty years, to a crisis of cruel and harrowing introspection, which can be observed in our moralist and political philosophers and, in a very spectacular manner, in the theater and the novel. It is also true that the working class as a whole does not exhibit the same signs of an uneasy conscience—either because, being less cultured, it has at its disposal inferior means of self-analysis or, being more activist, because it prefers pragmatic thought to an examination of conscience. This means in the end, by a sort of law, that during periods of social upheaval the young revolutionary masses enjoy the advantage of a good conscience while the patricians turn away from the perilous privilege of seeing things clearly.

To be sure, criticism of the bourgeoisie in bourgeois literature is not a contemporary phenomenon. It formed a whole phase of the romantic and realistic periods in the nineteenth century. In those decades the bourgeois were the philistines whom the artist derided. They had the foibles, the passions, and the vices which supply the novel and the theater with its customary themes. But where did one find the bourgeois order questioned as to its basic principles, bourgeois culture itself rejected, or bourgeois morality overturned, except in a few extraordinary cases, as those of an emancipated person such as George Sand or a rebel such as Jules Vallès? Certainly not in Balzac, Flaubert, the Goncourts, Augier, nor Dumas fils. A little later, around 1880, with Zola and Henri Becque, and naturalism at its peak, the criticism of the bourgeoisie by bourgeois writers was still confined to certain superficial aspects.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the situation is still more clear-cut. The writers of first rank, Bourget, Barrès, Maurras, conservative and nationalist, confirmed the governing classes in their good conscience, and they failed to take the socialism of the Anatole France set very seriously. But in the succeeding generation what a contrast can be found from the way in which Bourget had analyzed the bourgeois soul in *L'Etape* or his *Démon de Midi,* in the cruelty with which Mauriac wields the scalpel upon his Peloueyres and his Desqueyroux, or Bernanos upon his Clergeries. The bourgeois Christian reader is now invited to acknowledge all his moral failings, all the pharisaism in his way of life, to denounce all his accommodations between a fundamental selfishness and a Christianity marked by affectations or self-interest. And then in a secular climate there appeared the *Thibault* of Martin du Gard, the *Counterfeiters* of André Gide, the *Boussardel* of Hériat, *Les Loups* of Mazeline, *L'Ordre* of

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Arlant, all of them in some way novels dealing with a guilty bourgeois conscience.

THERE IS little need of pointing out that more recent literature goes still farther in the same direction. Whether it be in existentialist, Communist, or Catholic circles, the novelist invariably concerns himself with attacking bourgeois morality and the bourgeois order. In fact we novelists have to guard against giving way to a tendency which in the end may become too fashionable and commonplace. It is a strong tendency which manifests itself in actual life, for nothing is as striking as the anti-bourgeois attitude of the bourgeois youth of the present day.

I recognize, of course, how customary it is for each generation to reject the outlook of its own family environment, if with various shadings and degrees. Thirty or forty years ago in most cases bourgeois youth unfurled its nonconformism through reactionary political and social attitudes. It attacked the liberalism and dilettantism of the preceding generation and found, in *Action Française* a traditionalism and a dogmatism which reinforced its armor and strengthened its class faith. Today, by an overwhelming majority, comparable youth groups embody a more or less diffuse Marxism, often allied to a certain Christian context. They denounce the style of living to which such circles are accustomed and reject intellectual comfort (more often than not in addition to material comfort). In many cases that may be a form of indolence and snobbishness. But it is also often something quite serious, a form of guilty class conscience, an anxiety and even a psychosis of guilt, which the young bourgeois experiences when he realizes that he inherits, profits from and is involved in the sins of the bourgeoisie.

The uneasy national conscience is most apparent in the Frenchman, and especially the young Frenchman, who feels sorrowfully aware of the sins of France and his responsibility for them. It would be possible to show how the patriotism repudiated in the idealism of the Left in the nineteen twenties was reborn twenty years later in the Resistance and then again subsided during the crisis which has thrust France into armed conflict with its colonies. It is not that the Leftists have stopped loving their country, but it is clear that they have become more solicitous about safeguarding a certain juridical and moral purity than about supporting the material and political apparatus of French power. The underlying reason for this attitude is obvious. France has become embroiled in a bitter struggle with the peoples in colonies and various types of protectorates in Indo-China, Madagascar and North Africa. In order to protect political and economic interests it has been led to suppress their desire for independence, to refuse them the liberties whose principles it has taught them, to fight against *Maquis,* whose elite seem much more like the heroic resisters of World War II than the mercenaries they are fighting against today.

Moreover, French governments have been guilty of serious crimes, and more than once played the game of deception and violence—and all this in the defense of a system impaired by the moral tares and iniquities of colonialism. The conscientious have rejected this ambiguity; in the name of the values which are in danger, they have refused to engage in a struggle about which they would have feelings of guilt. Such a reaction does them honor, and it must be acknowledged that a policy embodying prudence and loyalty, which they have come to advocate, would often have proved more efficacious than has the false *Realpolitik* of force.

Nevertheless, all this has succeeded in the end, by exaggeration, in creating feelings of national guilt which are not always healthy. If France suffers an affront or some loss of prestige and power, there are simply too many people ready to justify the reasons and interests of their country's adversaries. Such discursive passivity in the face of serious blows to the national fortunes, often delivered by the enemies of the nation, in the long run alienates those who are willing objectively and humanely to recognize new situations but on condition that the fact that there is a French nation is not *a priori* left out of account.

FINALLY I mentioned a guilty conscience of culture. It would require much space to analyze the causes and to criticize the values of one of the leading phenomena of this century: the accusation of the West by the peoples whom the West has awakened and instructed but also exploited and deceived. There is also the way the thinking élite of the bourgeoisie has directed against its own class a self-criticism reinforced by the accusations of the social forces which beat against it, so that the national conscience bears the brunt of a number of the charges directed against France from without, while the inheritors of Western culture frequently act as witnesses summoned in the trial of the West by the prosecution.

I cite one example, but a significant one. In March, 1956, the European Society of Culture held a conference at Venice at which the intellectuals and writers of the bourgeois democracies and the Soviet world confronted each other. First of all the Communists who attacked Western thought, which had nourished them even in their Marxism, were already giving testimony in their fashion of the guilty conscience of the West.

But more characterstic was the general attitude of the Western intellectuals, particularly that of Sartre, about which Ignazio Silone, who presided, said: "The most curious aspect of our discussions is assuredly the very clear-cut opposition between Sartre and our Soviet

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colleagues. The more conciliatory the latter are toward the West, the more unyielding and hostile Sartre is." This is difficult to understand. *Les Mouches* told us that true liberty for Orestes was not to delight in the free play of a highflying idealism, as the Pedagogue had taught him, but rather to take his due place as a citizen of Argos.

Was not the valuable function of existentialism to remind us that man always acts in concrete situations, that his liberty is deployed not in abstract space and defined by pure intellect, but within the actual confines of an historical destiny? Must it not be agreed that the first object for a Western philosopher is to embrace the conscience of the West, not indeed to accept, justify and prolong the sins that trouble it, but to purify its values and rectify its decisions? Truly the harshness and hostility of Sartre toward the West are symptoms of an obsession of collective guilt applied no longer to a class, nor to a nation, but to civilization itself.

EVOLUTION OF A POET

Laforgue's Despairing Humor

VIVIAN MERCIER

IN A LETTER of December 6, 1881, to Charles Ephrussi, Jules Laforgue yearned from Berlin for his benefactor's art collection in Paris: "And the Impressionists! . . . Sisley's Seine with telegraph poles and spring sky. Or a river bank in the neighborhood of Paris, with a guttersnipe pastoralizing along the bypaths. . . ." Besides Sisley, the letter refers to Pissarro, Monet, Renoir, Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Degas, and Manet; with Ephrussi's help, Laforgue anticipated posterity's judgment very neatly.

The impressionist painters, rather than the Symbolist poets, are the proper beginning for an understanding of Laforgue—and of what T. S. Eliot and others learned from him. Unlike Mallarmé and the other whole-hog *symbolistes*, Laforgue never turned his back on life; he could never have written, as did Mallarmé:

> *Je fuis et je m'accroche à toutes les croisées*
> *D'où l'on tourne l'épaule à la vie. . . .*
> *(I flee, and I clutch at every window from which*
> *one turns one's shoulder upon life. . . .)*

On the other hand, he refused to wallow exclusively in the mire along with Zola and the *naturalistes*: "Life is gross, it's true—but for heaven's sake, when it comes to poetry, let us be as elegant as the sweet william; let us say absolutely everything there is to say (the filthy aspects of life ought, in fact, to add a note of witty melancholy to our lines), but let's say it all in a refined way." So it is that we get the peculiar blend of lyricism and realism in Laforgue which he noted in Sisley: he does not leave out either the telegraph poles or the spring sky. His remark about "witty melancholy" is enough by itself to justify Eliot's *rapprochement* of his poetry with John Donne's.

The Irish poet Austin Clarke once pointed out to me a line from *"L'Hiver qui vient"* which holds the quintessence of Laforgue. William Jay Smith renders it thus in his edition of Laforgue's *Selected Writings* (Grove Press. $4.): "Where can one sit? The park benches are dripping. . . ." How exact! This is just what the coming of winter did mean to the city dweller. Baudelaire, of course, had done the same kind of thing before Laforgue, as the latter hastened to admit: "He was the *first* to write about himself in a moderate confessional manner, and to leave off the inspired manner. He was the first to speak of Paris from the point of view of one of her daily damned . . . all in a noble, remote and superior fashion."

That last phrase establishes the difference between Baudelaire and Laforgue, who is neither remote nor superior and is noble only in a very special sense. He has humor, too, whereas Baudelaire feels more at home with irony; on the other hand, Baudelaire can achieve tragedy where Laforgue never rises above the pathetic —nor wishes to. Doubtless he felt that if man did not possess a soul, his fate was not important enough to be tragic.

Laforgue can blend pathos with humor, as in "The Coming of Winter," one of the poems in which Mr. Smith copes most successfully with his impossible task as translator:

> Now is the time when rust invades the masses,
> When rust gnaws into the kilometric spleen
> Of telegraph wires on roads where no one passes.
> The horns, the horns,—the sad,
> Sad horns! . . .
> They go on and on now changing their tone,
> Changing their tone and changing their tune,
> *Ton-ton, ton-ton, ton-tone!* . . .

Mr. Mercier, a frequent contributor, is a member of the faculty of the City College of New York.

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Away on the north wind now is borne
The sound of the horns, the sad, sad horns.

The pathos is easy to see, and the humor would probably be more evident if the childish *ton-ton* of the hunting horns had been rendered by some truer English equivalent like "toot-toot." But any French schoolboy would recognize an implicit parody of a famous Romantic poem, *"Le Cor"* ("The Horn"), by Alfred de Vigny. Finally, a great deal of the humor of the French lies in the rhymes; the scientific *kilométriques,* for instance, chimes with the poetical *mélancoliques* and *musique.*

PARADOXICALLY, one gets a better idea of Laforgue's highly individual style from the poems which Eliot wrote under his influence than from any direct translations. The very title of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" evokes Laforgue, who employed titles like "Complaints of the Pianos Which One Hears in Well-Off Neighborhoods." Laforgue's strange, half-humorous blend of the ephemeral with the eternal permeates such lines as these from "Prufrock":

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to
eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk
upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each
to each.

As for parody or allusion, those "mermaids singing" come from a poem doubtfully attributed to Donne.

Warren Ramsey—in *Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance,* the only full-length study of Laforgue in English—asks, "What has Laforgue meant to the American literary mind?" and devotes two chapters to his answer. He also puzzles over the question of why Laforgue, particularly, should be so influential:

"Mallarmé is a much greater poet than Laforgue. [I have grave doubts about that "much."] Corbière seems, on a first or second reading, to be a more vigorous one; . . . Rimbaud was a more intense creator, with some glimmering of the Romantic vision. Yet . . . it was the evasive, understating, ironic Laforgue, a prophet insufficiently honored in his own country even today, who exerted the unmistakable influence in ours. The best explanation is still the succinct one given by Ezra Pound: Laforgue was an angel with whom the American poetic Jacob had to wrestle."

"Evasive, understating, ironic": these three adjectives are hard indeed to apply to most American poetry —Emily Dickinson's always excepted—before 1909-10, when Eliot published his first three Laforgue-ish poems in the Harvard *Advocate.*

It is a little late in the day to repeat what so many have said about the relationship between Eliot's early versification and that of Laforgue's *Derniers Vers* (*Last Poems*), or to cite the many lines which Eliot borrowed and refashioned—such as *Simple et sans foi comme un bonjour,* which became "Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand" in "La Figlia Che Piange." Eliot has acknowledged to E. J. Greene that "Portrait of a Lady" and "Conversation Galante," along with the two poems already quoted, were written "under the sign of Laforgue." Other American poets whom Mr. Ramsey cites as translating and learning from Laforgue are Ezra Pound—who interested my generation as well as his own in the trinity of "Laforgue, Corbière, Rimbaud"—and Hart Crane. Mr. Ramsey sees Laforgue's influence most plainly in Pound's *Mauberley,* but also finds it in the structure of his *Cantos.* Wallace Stevens, too, as H. R. Hays has shown, owes a certain debt to Laforgue.

It is Eliot, though, who most clearly reveals the catalytic influence of the French poet. He was, to apply his own words, "metamorphosed almost, within a few weeks even, from a bundle of second-hand sentiments into a person . . . by a feeling of profound kinship, or rather of a peculiar personal intimacy with . . . a dead author." Crane lacked the humor—perhaps also the knowledge of French—as Pound lacked the humility, needed to extract from Laforgue all that he had to give.

But what all these American poets valued most in Laforgue was his sense of period, his contemporaneousness. With their telegraph wires and sanitary statistics, their rubbers, trains and layettes, his poems could not have been written before the second half—perhaps, even, the fourth quarter—of the nineteenth century. As a glance at the pre-Laforgue poems of Pound and Eliot will show, he taught them not only how to introduce twentieth-century subject matter into their poems, but also the ironic attitude to adopt toward it.

THE REALLY surprising and little-publicized fact about Laforgue is that his much-imitated poetic practice was the deliberate application of a carefully thought-out aesthetic theory, first formulated to justify the practice of the Impressionist painters. Those who read Mr. Smith's admirable selection from cover to cover will find this out for themselves, thanks to his inclusion of the essay "Impressionism," some fragmentary literary criticism, and certain key letters. Laforgue knew *exactly* what he was doing. Credit for illuminating this aspect of Laforgue belongs primarily to Médéric Dufour's brief, brilliant study, *Une Philosophie de l'impressionisme: Étude sur l'esthétique de Jules Laforgue.* This precocious young man, who died of tuberculosis at twenty-seven, wrote much more than *Derniers Vers.* The rhymed "free verse" in his last volume formed the climax of a philosophical and poetic development which seems too rich to have occupied only nine or ten years. One can mark at least five stages in it.

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The first is his loss of religious faith: "I used to believe. Then, a sudden break. Two years of solitude in libraries without love, friends, fearing death. Nights of meditation in an atmosphere of Sinai. . . ."

The next stage covers the writing, in traditional verse forms, of a series of philosophical poems, *Le Sanglot de la terre* (*Outcries of the Earth,* Mr. Smith calls them). In these he contemplated his own death and its finality amid the vast emptiness of a universe without God:

> Tonight I may die. Rain, wind, sun
> Will scatter everywhere my heart, my nerves, my marrow.
> All will be over for me. Neither sleep nor awakening.
> I shall not have been out there among the stars.

Next, in 1882-3, he evolves his new Impressionist aesthetic, based on Darwinian evolution and *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* by Karl von Hartman; he also begins to write, in his ironic, "modern" style, a series of *Complaintes* which later (1885) formed his first published volume. As he tells his sister Marie in the letter already quoted from:

"I have given up the ideal of philosophical poetry that I had in the rue Berthollet.

"I find it stupid to speak in a booming voice and adopt a platform manner. Today when I am more sceptical and don't get so easily carried away and moreover control my language in more minute clownlike fashion, I write little whimsical poems with only one aim in view: to be original at any cost."

Like Walter Pater a little earlier, he has come to see life as a continual flux. One must seize the unique impression of the moment before it disappears forever: hence the importance of novelty, originality, contemporaneousness. There is teleological justification for originality, since each novel form of artistic expression, according to Laforgue's theory, enables a new area of the Unconscious to evolve into consciousness; evolution is progress: "The Impressionist eye is, in short, the most advanced eye in human evolution, the one which until now has grasped and rendered the most complicated combinations of nuances known." From this evolutionary theory, however, follows the inevitable conclusion that Absolute Beauty and Absolute Taste do not exist. We can admire many different kinds of beauty, evolved in epochs other than our own, but we cannot arrange them in a hierarchy of absolute worth.

THE NEXT development is poetic rather than philosophic. In *The Imitation of Our Lady the Moon* (1886) we find Laforgue's closest anticipation of the *symbolistes,* who after all did not begin to form a school until 1886, the year before his death. In this volume Laforgue explores exhaustively the symbols of Clown and Moon, derived from the familiar nursery song,

> *Au clair de la lune*
> *Mon ami Pierrot. . . .*

Mr. Smith clearly feels a special affinity for this phase of Laforgue's work and translates a large number of the poems from *Imitation.* He writes: "Pierrot is for Laforgue a vehicle for the inner dialogue of a man of feeling. The moon which is addressed is quite explicitly the soul, the feminine side of the male personality in both its light and dark aspects, that which Jung has called the *anima.*"

Finally, in *Derniers Vers,* Laforgue's poetic evolution goes one step further still. Doubtless under the influence of Whitman, some of whose poetry he translated, he develops a form of *vers libre* which is hardly free at all by English and American standards, being bound together by rhyme, however irregular its recurrence. The verse is metrically free, however, being much more revolutionary to the French ear, trained in syllabic meters, than it is to ours. We tend to make his French lines scan by forcing an English stress accent upon them. The poems seem—*seem* is used advisedly—to grow rather than to be consciously shaped. The subject of each individual poem becomes harder and harder to define, but the new style is more and more the complete expression of a developed—and unique—poetic personality.

In discussing other matters such as Laforgue's highly original prose poems, *Les Moralités légendaires*—including his much-quoted "Hamlet"—his romantic love for and marriage with that fairy-tale heroine Miss Leah Lee, who died of tuberculosis the year after him, Mr. Smith makes an informed, informative and unobtrusive guide. I feel that he is perhaps a little more insensitive to the splendors and miseries of rhyme than a translator of Laforgue really ought to be, but his knowledge of French is almost impeccable and his sympathy with Laforgue virtually absolute. He and Mr. Ramsey together can pride themselves on having presented, for the first time in English, a three-dimensional portrait of the varied and complex personality that was Jules Laforgue.

No question would have seemed theoretically more pointless to Laforgue than that of his relative stature as a poet: "The lightning flashes of identity between subject and object are the true province of genius. To seek to codify flashes of lightning is an academic joke." Nevertheless, I cannot shirk the obligation to answer this question. I rank the poetry of Laforgue at his best very high indeed, especially by the standard of his single criterion of artistic worth—novelty. For all its superficial resemblance to that of Corbière, his poetry is unique. Like James Joyce, he is at once a realist, an ironist, a parodist, a virtuoso and a technical innovator.

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A MATTER OF RITUAL

DALTON TRUMBO, a successful screenwriter, began his career in 1936 with a flimsy little movie called "Life Begins at Twenty." During the next nine years he rose to the top with such screen credits as "A Bill of Divorcement," "Kitty Foyle," "A Guy Named Joe," "Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo" and "Tender Comrade." Besides these he authored such eminently forgettable films as "The Lone Wolf Strikes," "Sorority House," and "The Kid from Kokomo."

In 1947 Trumbo was one of the Hollywood figures called before the House Un-American Activities Committee who were asked to deny or affirm membership in the Communist Party. Ten of these witnesses, Trumbo among them, refused flatly to cooperate. All ten were subsequently cited for contempt of Congress and went to jail. From that day to this, Trumbo has been among the "unemployable" in the motion-picture industry.

During the Academy presentations this year, one Robert Rich, author of the screenplay for "The Brave One," was awarded an Oscar. Mr. Rich turned out to be a highly mysterious character whose identity and present whereabouts are shrouded in doubletalk. Inevitably, there were rumors that the real author of the Award-winning film was one of Hollywood's blacklisted screenwriters. The name of Dalton Trumbo was mentioned more frequently than any other.

Then a few weeks ago Trumbo was interviewed on a Los Angeles television station. He did not admit he was the mysterious Mr. Rich but did declare that he has written films under phony names on a blackmarket basis since he became officially "unemployable" in 1947. Among these films at least one—and not more than four—was nominated for an Academy Award.

Trumbo's revelation was greeted by an embarrassed silence in Hollywood.

The case of Carl Foreman, who took the Fifth Amendment when he was questioned by the Committee in 1951, has also aroused interest in recent months. Foreman was the author and associate producer of the highly successful "High Noon." He denied that he was a member of the Party at the time he testified but refused to answer questions about his past and so joined the "unemployables." But a few months ago Columbia Pictures announced that it had signed a contract to finance and distribute Foreman films. This aroused the curiosity of such groups as the Veterans of Foreign Wars and AWARE, Inc. The Veterans of Foreign Wars made inquiries about Foreman's being taken off the Hollywood black list. Columbia Pictures explained that Mr. Foreman had again appeared before the House Committee and had not taken the Fifth Amendment this time. The studio let it be known that the Committee had found him a satisfactory witness on this second go-round.

But Foreman's appearance and his testimony were never made public. If he "named names"—the usual standard by which a witness is counted as satisfactory—these names were not given to the press.

Under the circumstances, the Veterans of Foreign Wars were not satisfied that it was all right for Foreman to go back to work. They asked Congressman Francis E. Walter for more details. Chairman Walter replied, pointing out that Foreman had not actually received a formal hearing but had merely testified at a staff consultation. The Chairman did not deny that a release had been issued in the name of the Committee which might have created the impression that Foreman had been a cooperative witness (i.e., that he had named others, as he refused to do in 1951). It was even possible some might have got the impression that the movie writer had been cleared by the Committee. But, said Mr. Walter, this impression was "unfortunate."

On April 17, Godfrey P. Schmidt, president of AWARE, Inc., addressed an Open Letter to the Un-American Activities Committee questioning Foreman's present status. If Foreman goes back to work, Mr. Schmidt pointed out, the impression will be abroad that he was "cleared" by the Committee without telling all; the public may suffer the illusion that a special standard is being applied to Foreman. Such an illusion, Mr. Schmidt wrote, may well "undermine the fine work of your Committee and discourage truly repentant ex-Communists as well as many anti-Communists who believe that a Communist record undenied and unrepudiated is a record of unchanged significance."

One thing seems clear. At least some important people in Hollywood apply the black list against people like Trumbo not because they are truly afraid of Communist infiltration but because they are worried about public relations. If Dalton Trumbo can sell scripts under the table, it must be that those who buy them (at less than the fee a writer of Trumbo's stature might normally demand) do not believe that the Republic will be subverted by these movies. Why, then, does he not receive credit for his work?

It also seems clear that Foreman, who really has nothing to add to the already overtold history of Communism in Hollywood, simply must conform to the set pattern of confession, contrition, absolution and penance if he wants to be let alone.

I think it was Sidney Hook who coined the telling phrase "ritualistic liberals." There seems to be such a thing as ritualistic anti-Communism, too.

JOHN COGLEY.

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Poet of Our Youth

BETTE RICHART

DYLAN THOMAS said that "Out of an inevitable conflict of images . . . I try to make that momentary peace which is a poem." Unwittingly he defined the conspicuous technical deficiency of Edna St. Vincent Millay: there is no conflict of images, since such a conflict is "inevitable" only in major poets, and consequently there is no richness, no secret tension to relate the mystery of the poem to the mystery of human experience. There is no mystery in Millay's experience, nor was there in ours at the time when we applauded her as our spokesman. It was not peace, momentary or eternal, that she recorded, but merely the outcry. At eighteen, when most of us looked upon peace as complacency and hysteria as honesty, she was our very selves.

Not so today. The recent edition of her *Collected Poems* (Harper. $6.) has left me feeling wistful about the girl I was. With the splendid exception of a handful of sonnets (artistically inexplicable) she was to our youthful solitude what Jerome Kern was to our youthful romance. It saddens me to write it, "for today I'm dreaming of yesterday." Millay will be, if she is not already, a period piece, a cultural curio like roses made of hair and protected under glass. Nothing quite like her will ever happen again.

In her sequence "From a Very Little Sphinx" she says:

> Come along in then, little girl!
> Or else stay out!
> But in the open door she stands
> And bites her lip and twists her hands,
> And stares upon me, trouble-eyed:
> "Mother," she says, "I can't decide!
> I can't decide!"

There is no "conflict of images" here, but the image is memorable. It is a haunting and persuasive portrait of neurosis, and this is what she gives us again and again. But neurotic indecision and neurotic excess are not the ingredients of insight. They are symptoms of an illness; Millay was not our conscience but our neurosis, our indifference to all that took place outside the darkened arena of our own egos.

Today any high school student would be reprimanded for the use she made of the exclamation point. It is in her a state of mind, not really punctuation. Here is the first stanza of "God's World":

> O world, I cannot hold thee close enough!
> Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!
> Thy mists, that roll and rise!
> Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag
> And all but cry with color! That gaunt crag
> To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!
> World, World, I cannot get thee close enough!

Seven exclamation points in as many lines; the pathetic fallacy carried to the brink of pathetic lunacy. The effect is that of a coloratura slightly off-key; whatever quality there may be is lost in the shrillness. "God's World" is an early poem, but the "Look at me!" attitude persists; in her very last poems she is still railing against the end of love, the end of life, and even nature fails her then.

REREADING this testament of youth analytically, I found one lyric which could charm me still—"Recuerdo," a rarely disciplined expression of love's power to transfigure the drabness of daily life, and lift it from triviality to reality:

> We were very tired, we were very merry,
> We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
> We hailed "Good morrow, mother!" to a shawl-covered head,
> And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;
> And she wept, "God bless you!" for the apples and pears,
> And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

The spontaneous generosity of love is a theme she seldom celebrates; usually she emphasizes its petulance instead:

> And if I loved you Wednesday,
> Well, what is that to you?
> I do not love you Thursday—
> So much is true.

Perhaps she intended this mood to be gay, but it is only irascible.

Another famous quatrain which charmingly distorted our youth was the "First Fig" of "Few Figs from Thistles":

> My candle burns at both ends;
> It will not last the night;

Miss Richart is an American poet whose work has been widely published.

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But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light!

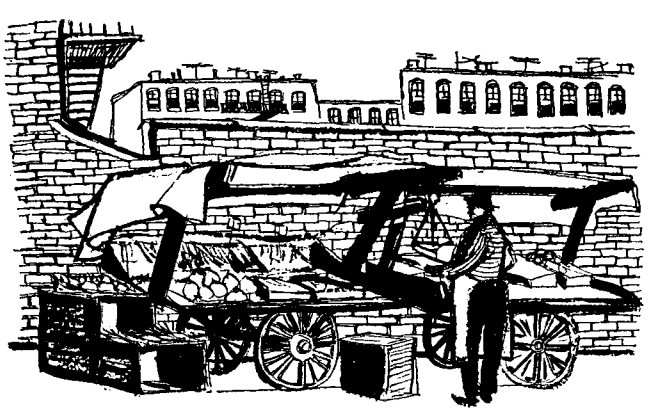
This is surely the most solipsistic candle since philosophy began, and one that will not throw its beams very far.

Preoccupation with death is indigenous to poetry, and here Millay rises, even in the lyrics, to occasional heights. In "Childhood is the Kingdom Where Nobody Dies" ("nobody dies that matters—mothers and fathers don't die"), in the surprisingly understated "Elegy," the epiphany of an experience that cannot be dissembled is achieved. In the early poem "The Suicide" she convinces us of both the cowardice and the pathos of that act, without the false piety that frequently mars "Renascence," when the form itself does not reduce it to the inspirational level of newspaper poetry. (How earnestly Edgar Guest must wish he had written it.) Yet it is a better poem than "Renascence" because it does not exalt the power of positive thinking above the finalities of God; technically clumsy though it is, it is gravely and tenderly realistic, and I hope everyone will read it again.

One untitled poem appearing for the first time in this collection is concerned with the impact of death, and concludes:

Not that you ever—
O love inflexible, O militant forgiveness,
I know
You kept no books against me! In my own hand
Are written down the sum and the crude items of my inadequacy.
It is only that there are moments when for the sake of a little quiet in the brawling mind I must search out
Recorded in my favor
One princely gift:
The most I ever did for you was to outlive you.
But that is much.

This is personal, not universal, grief, but it is explicit and poignant. However, even at their best, taking leave of them, we must say the lyrics are poignant but not tragic. It is personality, not emotion, that shines through; in their indecision, excess and petulance lies the definition of what Dr. Horney calls "the neurotic personality in our time."



BUT THIS is not true of the sonnets. Here both love and death, traditionally and formally disciplined, achieve the wan glory of the human condition, and one at least ("Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare") attempts the blazing glory of the immortal condition.

O blinding hour, O holy, terrible day,
When first the shaft into his vision shone
Of light anatomized! Euclid alone
Has looked on Beauty bare. Fortunate they
Who, though once only and then but far away
Have heard her massive sandal set on stone.

We see what Thomas means by that "momentary peace which is a poem." We observe that alchemy of art, that fusion of grief with glory, of effort with vision, which makes a slight difference in all our days forever.

It is impossible to solve the riddle of how Millay (who did not experiment at all with form, who possessed in her lyrics little if any formal intuition, whose vocabulary was oversimplified and whose pure rhyme often deteriorated into jingle) almost as often as not triumphed in the sonnet. To the modern ear it is a form more difficult than even the villanelle (Dylan Thomas has made that seem easy), but the reason does not lie in the form itself. The form in fact is so simple that it must be redeemed by profundity, and there's the rub. To fit profundity to a pattern, whether in liturgy, sonnet or fugue, is man's most moving achievement. Now and then Millay made it. I can offer no theory about how such a muted work of art as "Love is not all; it is not meat nor drink" came from that desperate and tremulous hand. It is not my business anyway; it is only my business to observe that it is so.

Two critics of note, occupying opposite poles, have already surveyed Millay's work. One was Edmund Wilson, whose appreciation immediately following her death was really, as has been remarked, a love letter. A critic's heart may on occasion rule his head, but it shouldn't rule his taste, and from Mr. Wilson especially this love letter was a rather embarrassing spectacle.

The other memorable critique was by Sister Mary Madaleva, who posed a question early in Millay's career. "Where Are You Going, My Pretty Maid?" she inquired. At the time it seemed an impertinence to me; what could a nun know of the Higher Ecstasy? But I was very young, and Sister Madaleva was right. There are no capitalized emotions, and few exclamation points, in poetry. And the primrose path is as fatal in art as in morality.

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People's Capitalism:

Business with pleasure: General Electric's President Ralph J. Cordiner (*left*), Board Chairman Philip D. Reed, and Secretary Ray H. Luebbe enjoy a share owner's comment at the Annual Meeting. From as far away as California, about 4,000 people come each year to Schenectady, N. Y., to meet the men who represent them on the board of directors and to get acquainted with the managers of their company.

From all walks of life: General Electric owners are typical of America's capitalists. Many of them are also customers, suppliers, dealers, or neighbors in our plant communities. In addition, 129,000 General Electric employees are also owners, or becoming owners.

Owners get a close look: So they can participate more fully in company affairs, share owners have an opportunity to meet General Electric people and review current and future plans. Above, share owners are fitted with safety glasses before a plant tour (*right*).

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The 370,000 owners who have savings invested in General Electric are typical of America, where nearly every citizen is a capitalist

Owners disagree on a point of interest: Even though the young lady is counting on General Electric for part of her future, her attention can wander during the meeting.

Women capitalists: The ladies' viewpoint is significant: half of General Electric's owners are women — and to many, their investment can mean security now or in the future.

If a visitor from abroad had been able to sit down with the men and women at the General Electric Share Owners Meeting in April, he might have discovered a good deal about capitalism in this country.

The visitor could have learned, for instance, that millions of people from all walks of life—not just a wealthy handful—own America's businesses. There were about 4,000 men and women at the meeting. Some were housewives, some employees of the company, some businessmen, some retired folks—the kind of people you meet every day.

They are typical of the 370,000 men and women who have chosen to invest part of their savings in General Electric . . . of the 10 million Americans who own "a piece of the business" in other corporations . . . of the millions who have a stake in the small family businesses in every community . . . and of the 100 million capitalists who indirectly own shares in companies like General Electric through their insurance policies, mutual savings-bank accounts, pension plans, mutual funds or other forms of investment.

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THE STAGE

THE MATHEMATICS OF FARCE

IN ONE OF those ferocious exaltations which attended the ordeal of *Madame Bovary,* Flaubert was seized with the vision of "a book about nothing at all, a book which would exist by virtue of the mere internal strength of its style, as the earth holds itself unsupported in the air—a book which would have almost no subject, or in which, at least, the subject would be almost imperceptible, if such a thing is possible." Something of that same abstract passion, though wholly in another sphere, would seem to have animated the eminent *farceur* Georges Feydeau, whose deceptively Edwardian period piece, "Hotel Paradiso" —more slyly in French *L'Hotel du Libre Exchange*— has lately opened and appears certain to repeat here its London success. It is difficult to "place" Feydeau—he is scanted by the conventionally respectable histories and texts—yet his work is one of the bizarre aesthetic objects of the last century; it is kept in currency by the Comedie Française, and has tested the mettle of players so intrepid as Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault.

The world of Feydeau is alien to the ethical, romantic Anglo-Saxon, for it is a world indifferent to sentiment or morality or psychological nuance. Its characters are flat: monstrous dilations—"humours" in the Jonson sense—of a single trait: the termagant wife; the leering upstairs maid; the cringing, carnal, cornered husband. Their relation to the sharply stylized figures of the *commedia dell' arte* might also be established. The climate reeks of bourgeois immutability, and the plot is a tissue of mild salacities. Indeed, the typical Feydeau farce is a massive documentation of what Mr. W. H. Auden calls the conventional images of Paris as "the city of the Naughty Spree—Mademoiselle Fifi, bedroom mirrors and bidets, lingerie and adultery, the sniggers of school boys and grubby old men." (I remember sitting once on the Boulevard St. Michel with an amiable Scot, upon whom fell a reverent silence at the passage of a gaggle of patchy students, their callow faces plainly visible beneath the hopeful underbrush of beards. "This is where they let their inhibitions go," he announced darkly.) Yet Feydeau's preoccupation was not with this innocuous titillation, nor with verbal wit, nor even an ironic posture of the mind, but rather with mechanical form—what I am forced to call, mixing two genres, the mathematics of theater. The man who wrote "Hotel Paradiso" was a passionate architect—profoundly humorless, I do not doubt—obsessed with the vision of a kind of monstrous infernal machine closing in on its ludicrous victims; nothing seems to have interested him but the infinite permutations of the absurd. He forces one to realize freshly that farce is but the systematic inversion of tragedy. Desdemona's handkerchief; the carpet which Agamemnon treads; Charles Bovary's foolish cap—symbols of fatality all —become in the Feydeau world a box of cigars, a face towel, a top hat, agents of a passive but insane diabolism, operating in the service of a satanic indifference and inexorable logic which would have dazzled Sophocles.

The pleasures farce affords are intellectually inexhaustible; are those of the comic sense, however, something richer? Baudelaire makes a distinction (in *The Essence of Laughter*) between the "significantly comic"—an imitation—and the "absolutely comic, or grotesque"—a creation. He awards a proportionate superiority to the latter because "it is much closer to nature, has a *unity* which must be grasped by intuition." I take "Hotel Paradiso" to belong to this genre of the absolutely comic; it is a parody of nothing but itself; not even remotely does it suggest an ideal of the useful or the rational. It also passes Baudelaire's acid test for the grotesque by provoking immediate laughter. But the absolute as a constant climate is insupportable, and this passionate abstraction is doubtless what accounts for the fatigue one senses in the middle reaches of "Hotel Paradiso," as of a mathematical formula extended logically into infinity. One wants the impure relief of sentiment and morality; the complex, soiled actuality of the merely comic.

Within its terms, Mr. Peter Glenville's production is a faultless act of perception. He has enforced the rhythmic, almost musical, beat of farce with a martinet's precision; not by accident do the play's final moments achieve almost the condition of an operatic chorus. Mr. Osbert Lancaster's dotty Edwardian costumes (consider the vastly dissimilar uses to which period elegance is put in "Hotel Paradiso" and "My Fair Lady"); the obscene efflorescence of his decors, and especially the scrim curtain he has designed—a catalogue, in the advertising manner, of physical disorders, diseases and disasters, which ends by making a kind of joke of the body—all these propel "Hotel Paradiso" into that realm where it will be invulnerable to human feeling or rationality.

The players animate the farce with a relish and disciplined lunacy rare in the casual Anglo-Saxon theater. Miss Vera Pearce, as a dragon of domesticity, affirms in blood the ceaseless war between men and women when she charges her mate (husband would be an inappropriate word), brandishing a great hatpin, and augustly crying: *En garde!* Miss Angela Lansbury, swooping and sinuous, commands the stage as she arraigns fortune, her creamy turret of hair heaving with outrage like an indignant vanilla pudding. Mr. Douglas Byng suggests a man whose knee reflexes are

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aught in a rhythm of perpetual motion. We are again n Mr. Walter Kerr's debt for the single, infallible mage he has given us of Mr. Bert Lahr as a bird dog: eet flat, eyes alert, nose poised, quivering at the cent. Something is surely Mr. Lahr's fresh quarry, ut I must sadly confess that I have not the evocative ower to lead you into those distant reaches of ferocious and absolute madness where he goes yelping so oyously. *(At the Henry Miller.)*

RICHARD HAYES.

THE SCREEN

WAR GAMES

HIGHLY PRAISED in Great Britain, where it won the British Academy Award for the best picture of 1956, "Reach for the Sky" is now on view for American audiences, and it remains to be seen if they will be as enthusiastic as their English cousins over this film biography of Douglas Bader, the English air ace who has become "a legend in his own lifetime." Except for the scenes showing the legless Bader, a determined and high-spirited man, learning to use his new artificial legs, the movie left this American pretty cold. It traces Bader's career from the twenties, when he was a cadet pilot at the Royal Air Force College, and goes on with the early flying experiences that culminate in a crash costing him his legs. Losing both legs is a bitter blow for the carefree young man whose only interests are sports and flying. But he survives and learns to walk remarkably well with his "tin legs"—walk and dance and drive a car and even fly. But the Air Force grounds him and he finds life monotonous—until World War II. Then he takes to the air once more, and as Wing Commander Douglas Bader proves quite a hero in the Battle of Britain.

Kenneth More gives an admirable performance in the difficult lead role, which is practically the whole—and much too long—show. Director Lewis Gilbert, who also wrote the script from Paul Brickhill's biographical novel, allows the large and good supporting cast (including Muriel Pavlow, Alexander Knox, Lyndon Brook, Dorothy Alison) to have an occasional scene, but he concentrates on Bader—and More manfully carries the burden. However, in spite of More's valiant efforts, Bader seldom comes through as much more than a man of great fortitude and daredevil recklessness. Bader doesn't feel sorry for himself after his dreadful accident, but he does rather enjoy dramatizing himself and flaunting his undeniable skill with his artificial legs. He seems almost to welcome World War II

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as an opportunity for him to prove his prowess; and it is unfortunate that so much of the last part of the film is taken up with undistinguished scenes of war and flying. Perhaps "Reach for the Sky" ran into the same difficulties as John Ford's recent movie, "The Wings of Eagles," which also tried to honor a man of audacious courage who survived an accident, but which also handled the facts guardedly and used clichés freely. In favor of the English film, however, it must be said that it tries to avoid sentiment.

ANOTHER British film dealing with the somewhat tired subject of bravery in World War II is "Above Us the Waves." If this well-made movie had turned up some ten years ago, it would no doubt have won applause. It has a good script, written by Robin Estridge, about the use of midget submarines—especially in the efforts to destroy the *Tirpitz,* the German battleship hiding in a Norwegian fjord. And Ralph Thomas has directed his large male cast well, successfully creating characters in whom we are as much interested as we are in the outcome of their desperate mission.

Told in an effective documentary style, "Above Us the Waves" works up suspense during the selection and training of the men for the bold experiment with "toy submarines," during the first try at the *Tirpitz,* which is a failure, and especially during the successful action, which is shown in detail. As with so many English casts, this one, led by John Mills, Donald Sinden, John Gregson, Michael Medwin, Anthony Wager, is good right down the line. Since the war we have seen many films like "Above Us the Waves," but for those not surfeited by too much of a good thing, here is still another in the line.

WHEN THE British and Americans work together to make a film, they don't necessarily do better than either country alone. "Wicked As They Come" would indicate that they do worse. It is a ridiculous and old-fashioned melodrama about a beautiful girl (Arlene Dahl) who's determined to rise from New York's slums and uses men as stepping stones on her way. In most cases, the foolish, foolish men are only too anxious to be stepped on, and Arlene's primrose path is strewn with victims from London to Paris. That she escapes the guillotine after accidently shooting her husband (Ralph Truman) is due only to the persistent detective work of admirer Phil Carey. Among others taken in by Miss Dahl, whose beauty continues radiant in spite of her wickedness, are Michael Goodliffe and Herbert Marshall. They are all very silly boys indeed.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

COMMUNICATIONS

"TOLERANCE AND THE TRUTH"

Princeton, N.J.

TO the Editors: Apropos of John Cogley's page on "Tolerance and the Truth" [Apr. 19], members of the academic profession in this neighborhood, both Catholic and Protestant, have for more than two years been on "the receiving end" of "adventures in semantic shock." While these originated with a Catholic ecclesiastic, he cannot be designated a prelate. But that his efforts "embitter" and "poison the controversies between good men" there is no doubt.

Perhaps the words written 440 years ago by a famous English Catholic layman, subsequently raised to the altars, are pertinent to this question of truth and tolerance. Saint Thomas More tells us that King Utopus "made a decree that it should be lawful for every man to favor and follow what religion he would, and that he might do the best he could to bring others to his opinion, so that he did it peaceably, gently, quietly and soberly, without haste and contentious rebuking and inveighing against others. If he could not by fair and gentle speech induce them unto his opinion yet he should use no kind of violence, and refrain from unpleasant and seditious words. To him that would vehemently and fervently in this cause strive and contend was decreed banishment or bondage. This law did King Utopus make not only for the maintenance of peace, which he saw through continual contention and mortal hatred utterly extinguished; but also because he thought this decree would make for the furtherance of religion . . . yet did he well foresee (so the matter were handled with reason and sober modesty) that the truth of its own power would at the last issue out and come to light. But if contention and debate in that belief should continually be used, as the worst men be most obstinate and stubborn, and in their evil opinion most constant; he perceived that then the best and holiest religion would be trodden underfoot and destroyed by most vain superstitions even as good wheat is by thorns and weeds overgrown and choked."

HUGH STOTT TAYLOR.

"A HOUSE DIVIDED"

Greenwich, Conn.

TO the Editors: Jaime Potenze in his article "A House Divided" [March 1] dealing with Inter-American Relations, says that "the truth of the matter is that we do not know each other well, and that generalizations are therefore dangerous and misleading." Undoubtedly, this statement goes to the essence of the matter and many of our difficulties stem from

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our ignorance of one another and are accentuated by broad misconceptions which flow from this source.

It is too bad that the article itself, whose author has written a number of interesting commentaries on Argentine developments, is one series of misconceptions, generalizations, and worn out clichés. These grate on the ears of anyone who knows and loves the Americas and is aware of their strengths and weaknesses, virtues and faults, but still feels that, relatively speaking, this Hemisphere and its inter-relationships do not offer as pessimistic a picture as Mr. Potenze would have us believe.

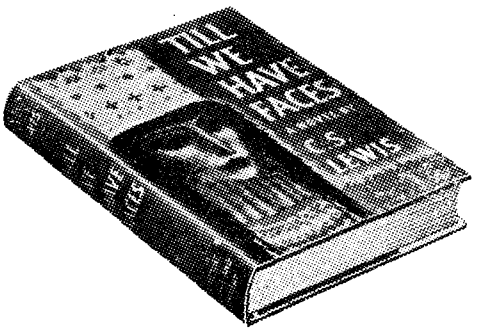
Let me mention just a few of his statements that I would like to challenge. First of all, it simply is not true that we always relate suffering or pain, disgrace or poverty to any consideration of Latin America. If anything, this seems to be a theme which has been exploited in recent years by Latin American governments as an argument in favor of increased U.S. economic aid. I would refer Mr. Potenze to a recent article published on this subject by Mr. John Hickey entitled "The Economics of Self-Pity" published in the *Inter-American Economic Review*.

What kind of nonsense is it to say that South America (Mr. Potenze seems to forget that he really is talking about Latin America) is today nothing but a conglomeration of dictatorships who know that as long as they put their raw materials at the disposal of the United States, nobody will bother them. This is a purely gratuitous statement.

What does he mean when he says that if cooperation really rested on the foundation of the Pan American spirit, the United States could be an important factor in the development of the countries south of the border? The United States has always been and is an important factor in the development of Latin America. What he probably means is that the United States Government should undertake the economic development of this area, but this is a very debatable point on which Latin Americans themselves disagree violently. Recently, I had occasion to speak on the subject at a university forum and, subsequently, I found myself endeavouring to reconcile two Latin Americans who took diametrically opposing views on precisely this subject.

At another point Mr. Potenze recommends that if U.S. officials wish to understand our Southern Neighbors, then they should study a little Spanish psychology. I realize that our officials in many cases could use more and better psychology. How Spanish this should be, I do not know, for other countries besides ourselves have psychological impediments.

I applaud Mr. Potenze's love of democracy and his desire to see stronger and better relationships among all of us. I recognize that there is much to criticize about all of us, but I don't believe that the solution



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to the real point which he makes at the end of his article—our ignorance of one another—is well served by listing a series of half-truths and disconnected generalizations that are, for the most part, misleading. Moreover, I do not believe the degree of ignorance is quite as serious as he believes it is. At no point is recognition given to the many fine efforts that are being made on all sides, governmental and private, to bring about greater understanding and respect among all the Americas.

CHARLES HENRY LEE.

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

TO the Editors: Pan-American unity is a lot of poppycock, says Jaime Potenze in your March 1st issue. The Americas, as so-called "sister nations," disdainfully ignore one another, he says, because "most of us really do not care a hoot about what's going on in other nations of the Americas."

I'll be a little more blunt than Señor Potenze and lay the blame on the editorial desks of the North American press. As a democracy whose law-making, policy-forming institutions are predicated on an informed electorate, the United States is disgracefully ignorant of its next-door neighbors. To an alarming majority of Americans—perhaps I should say Yankees, to be more explicit—Brazil is a country of coffee, carnival and Copacabana Beach, surrounded by a mysterious Amazon jungle full of anacondas and bushmasters, crocodiles and headhunting Indians. The rest of Central and South American nations are pigeonholed as hot, steaming places where the ignorant, lazy natives spend their days sleeping under wide-brimmed straw hats, waking every few months to shoot their way through the streets of the local capital and mow down the men in office and anyone else who happens to be in the way.

Why should North Americans who know so much about the latest shifts in the French cabinet, the ups and downs of Togliatti, the most recent utterings of Nehru, Nasser and Nagy, continue to remain so uninformed about an entire continent? One of the most glaring reasons is that very little is ever printed about Latin America. The *Herald Tribune* correspondent who covered the recent attempt by Peronistas to overthrow the Arambu government admitted that of all the reams he sent to his paper, only a few inches found their way into print. Editors excuse themselves by saying that there's little call for any stuff about goings-on south of the border.

And so it seems to be a vicious circle—editors claim that readers are not interested, and readers are not interested because they very seldom read anything that will change their stereotyped picture of Latin Americans. A few small magazines, such as The Commonweal do allot a little space to Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Nicaragua, but most periodicals and newspapers freeze out their "sister nations" with silence. American voters who depend upon the press as a sole source of information about current affairs will never be the wiser if they never read anything about South America. Is it any wonder, then, that the State Department trips over its own ignorance when it steps south of the border?

It need not be a vicious circle if editors, as custodians of public opinion, would occasionally run an article datelined Rio de Janeiro or Buenos Aires or Lima. Let me ask you this. How many of your own friends and acquaintances who pride themselves as being informed citizens of the world know that Brazilians don't speak Spanish? That Brazil, a country that is larger than the United States and has a population of some sixty million, has some of the most progressive architecture in the world? And how many Catholics know that one of the most difficult and challenging areas of this world for the missionary priest is Rio de Janeiro?

As Señor Potenze says, "if U.S. officials want to understand Latin America, it would be wise for them to study a little Spanish psychology through the ages, instead of banking on platitudinous slogans." Just the other day, one of these officials, sitting in the cool comfort of the air-conditioned U.S. Embassy, dismissed the problems of sixty million people by saying, "Brazilians are just lazy, that's all." If he'd open his eyes and walk to the corner with me, he'd know that this was not true of all Brazilians. There's the baker who has worked from 8 A.M. to 9 P.M. every day, 365 days a year, for the past twenty years; the *garrafeiro,* a burlap bag slung over his shoulder, who walks the streets from dawn to dusk buying old paper, rags and used bottles; the vegetable man, the fruit man, the scissors grinder and the tinker who all put in a ten to twelve hour day for six, sometimes seven, days out of the week.

"Government and city officials are all corrupt here," said another American, forgetting that until public education became an actuality instead of just a dream, and people learned to read, vote and take an active interest in community affairs, the United States was

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administered by a great many conscience-less characters who fattened their purses at public expense.

But I can't agree with Jaime Potenze when he says that South Americans know little of North Americans. In Rio de Janeiro, at least, Brazilians know a great deal about us. It's true that many who either can't read, or have little time for it, and depend upon Hollywood as their source of information, sometimes believe that the U.S. is populated solely by movie actors, millionaires, cowboys and gangsters who live either in New York or Chicago, California or Texas. But the literate population knows us very well, almost uncomfortably so. They know all about the bus boycott in Montgomery; they are as concerned as their neighbors to the north about President Eisenhower's persistent cough; and they not only read The Commonweal's editorials about "Baby Doll" but quote them in *Manchete,* one of the most widely circulated Brazilian pictorial magazines. They follow our eggheads, our Rock'n'Roll, our nuclear physicists; and watch our Senators, our juvenile delinquents, demagogues and gray flannel suiters with an almost frightening concentration. If there is ever to be any Pan-American unity, is it not our obligation to turn our eyes southward and look at our neighbors?

WILLIAM N. BROWN.

BOOKS

The Inevitable Tensions of the Political Novel

POLITICS AND THE NOVEL. By Irving Howe. Horizon Press. $3.50.

By JOSEPH M. DUFFY, JR.

THE NUMBER of intelligent and perceptive books on the novel is so few that it is especially pleasant to welcome an addition to that small group. In *Politics and the Novel* Irving Howe makes a limited approach to fiction, but it is a worthwhile one because of the material he has chosen and because of his special talents and interests as a critic.

Howe is one of those critics whose concern is not solely with the literary work as formal object but also, and often more notably, with its cultural and ideological ramifications. In the field of literary history the late F. O. Matthiessen of Harvard gave brilliant evidence of the possibilities of such criticism in his *American Renaissance.* And Lionel Trilling of Columbia, the most distinguished of American critics, almost everywhere in his writing takes notice of what he himself calls the "hum and buzz" of cultural activity out of which art is conceived and to which, as well, it contributes.

Although Howe's literary intelligence is not so finely persuasive as Trilling's, and although he does not at all times maintain an appropriate detachment from his material, he is, nevertheless, not coarse in his method and he does not lose sight of his responsibilities as a critic. He is a representative type of the New York Jewish intellectual who has been in our time such an important and fruitful influence on American culture: a type that may be characterized as cosmopolitan, liberal, *engagé,* and most adept in the dialectic of art, philosophy, and politics. More personally, Howe has always been a radical socialist in politics so that the present volume emerges as a natural fusion of his political engagement and his literary interests.

In opening his discussion Howe defines the political novel as he understands it (italics are his): "a novel in which *we take to be dominant* political ideas or the political milieu, a novel which permits this assumption without thereby suffering any radical distortion and, it follows, with the possibility of some analytical profit." Somewhat later he adds that the political novel "is peculiarly a work of internal tensions. To be a novel at all, it must contain the usual representation of human behavior and feeling; yet it must also absorb into its stream of movement the hard and perhaps insoluble pellets of ideology."

After this basis of definition and problem has been established, Howe considers a variety of nineteenth and twentieth century European and American novelists from Stendhal to Orwell and including Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Hawthorne, James, Conrad, Malraux, and Silone. The particular novels examined range from *The Possessed* — Howe calls Dostoevsky "the greatest of all ideological novelists" —to *1984* which Howe, in perhaps his least literary vein, reads as a prophetic paradigm for the movement of our culture. In making the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century political novelists, Howe notes that the latter writers are much more closely involved with the politics they represent: "they *are* in their tragedies, their blood and hope are ground into the defeated revolutions over which they mourn." And it might in turn be noted about Howe that in describing the work of these writers, he also is much more involved in their politics; and the passion of his political commitment exceeds the intensity of his literary scrutiny.

Almost any of the chapters from *Politics and the Novel* might be cited for the enlightenment they give to the works considered: especially those on *The Possessed,* on James' *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Bostonians,* and on Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance.* But the section on Conrad, "Conrad: Order and Anarchy," is of signal quality and may be used as evidence of the real contribution in Howe's method and of its weakness as well. Howe observes that Conrad was hostile to the life of politics and yet in some of his most

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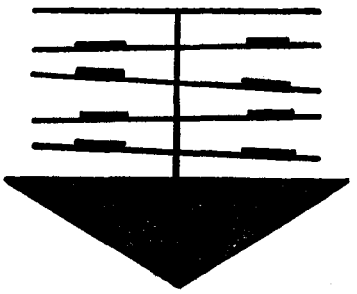

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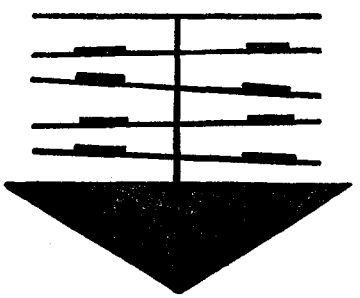

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significant work turned "to the world of London anarchists, Russian emigrés, Latin revolutionaries." This paradox in choice of materials is complemented by the polar influences of the two writers who "mattered most" to Conrad, Dostoevsky and James. Conrad claimed to have hated "the confusion and insanity" of Dostoevsky while he aspired to the austere formal achievement of James: yet beneath the austere calm of Conrad's own work the insane impulse always threatens to break through. From these premises Howe moves from a discussion of *Under Western Eyes* through *The Secret Agent* to *Nostromo,* which he regards quite properly as Conrad's masterpiece. But in his treatment of *The Secret Agent,* certainly one of the great pessimistic works of art in our language, Howe complains about the lack of "some dramatic principle of contradiction" in that "corrosive" novel, "a moral positive to serve literary ends." This criticism, even with its gesture toward "literary ends," seems to make moralistic demands on the artist to which the artist need not acquiesce. The greatness of *The Secret Agent* lies precisely in the force of its vision of a world without hope, without possibilities for individual moral achievement. To observe fretfully that the novel denies its characters "the mildest claims to dignity and redemption" is to reject the great bleak point of the novel—and to reject it on non-aesthetic grounds. Here Howe, the political humanist, seems to be on as infirm critical ground as the narrow religious critic who complains about the philosophical or theological bias of a work of art—when it is not his.

While it is inevitable that there should be omissions in such a study, it is surprising that no modern American political novel is given more than cursory notice: John Dos Passos, Lionel Trilling and Robert Penn Warren are covered in a perfunctory paragraph at the end of a chapter on nineteenth century American novelists. On the mechanical level another defect of *Politics and the Novel* is the lack of an index, useful and expected in any such serious work. Finally, the book is generally not well written and simply badly written in places. A careful revision of the style of *Politics and the Novel* might have removed some of the metaphors, intended to be illuminating but which only draw attention to themselves; particularly bothersome as mannerisms are the images of saturation with which the book is "drenched."

Despite this criticism, we are indebted to Irving Howe for the work of elucidation he has performed in *Politics and the Novel.* The effect of this book is the right one for such a study: it provokes the desire to turn back, with heightened interest, to most of the novels considered.

A Right to Leaven

THE AMERICAN CONSCIENCE. By Roger Burlingame. Knopf. $6.75.

By VICTOR C. FERKISS

EVERY human society has felt itself to be different from its neighbors. Pericles' funeral oration was only the first of innumerable attempts of peoples to define the essence of their national character. During the past generation in America, however, the study of national character has been considered somewhat intellectually disreputable because of its association with the theory of innate racial differences—a theory vigorously disputed by modern American anthropologists led by Franz Boas.

Of late, however, increased attention has been paid to the subject of comparative culture. Cultural anthropologists have long used the notion of "culture" as a concept for integrating and giving coherence to the behavior patterns of whatever isolated, primitive group they might be studying. World War II emboldened some of them to use this concept in describing such complex modern societies as Japan, Germany, and Russia. Margaret Mead, in her book *And Keep Your Powder Dry,* even went so far as to attempt to analyze twentieth-century

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America in this fashion. The concept of "national character" had returned to the intellectual scene through a back door.

The American Conscience is the latest guide offered to Americans in their almost neurotic search for self-understanding. The author is a free-lance writer on American history and the book is actually a truncated cultural history of America, stressing "the judgments that Americans have passed on themselves" throughout the course of their history. According to Mr. Burlingame, the American conscience is unique—the result of the unique character of the "formative period" of our history, during which the fundamental American moral outlook on life took shape. The dominant characteristics of this period were isolation, the frontier, and the abundance of free land. These external circumstances, in combination with the internal attitudes engendered by Puritanism, were the influences which shaped the American character for all time. Nothing has happened in the last fifty years which has had any effect in forming this national "conscience," and any change in its elements, the author implies, would mean that we had somehow ceased to be "ourselves" and had become a different nation.

Although the author does insert occasional, somewhat arbitrary discussions of American sex and drinking habits, *The American Conscience* is concerned almost exclusively with political themes. The "American conscience" is apparently both created by and most clearly revealed in the political decisions that it makes. It is certainly not religious in nature—our Puritan "ethical sense" quickly "emerged" from "the jargon and dogma of revealed religion" and seemingly exhibits a strong propensity for coinciding with the dictates of economic interest. Our conscience took form within the context of three great crises—a developing revolutionary conscience culminated in the break with Great Britain; a clash of regional consciences culminated in the Civil War (the greatest crisis the American conscience ever

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faced); and, eventually, a national conscience was born in the reaction to the muck of the gilded age. This progress is cyclical in nature, although the spiral is ever upward: periods of moral fervor alternate with the worst kind of tolerance of corruption, but out of every period of corruption evolves a broader, more purified system of popular ethics.

The book manifests throughout what might well be called White Anglo-Saxon Protestant chauvinism —other contributions to the American ethos are just assumed out of existence. What references Mr. Burlingame makes to other strains in American life are infrequent and usually uncomplimentary. As a result his interpretations of historical fact are sometimes as wide of the mark as they are dogmatic.

Yet the book's faults are largely those of ignorance and unsophistication rather than of malice. It is even possible to defend Mr. Burlingame's exclusive concern with the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant tradition, for there is a sense in which America makes Puritans of us all —Catholics, Jews, Protestants, and Agnostics alike. The Puritan spirit seems to be something we inhale with each breath we take. We may wish that the "formative period" had not been quite so formative, but it was, and here we are—a self-righteous people, convinced of our own invincibility regardless of anything we may do or leave undone, contemptuous of fine intellectual and moral distinctions, and combining racial pride with a missionary zeal and a naive faith in human goodness.

Whether a country with this kind of "conscience" is well-fitted for survival in today's highly interdependent industrial world or in the jungle of modern international politics seems at least questionable. A nation with a boom-or-bust moral economy is at a serious disadvantage in a situation which demands long-run policies carried out with ice-cold nerve.

But this need not mean that we have to accept Mr. Burlingame's thesis that the American conscience is forever unchangeable. Though most Americans, including Mr. Burlingame, would be dismayed by the suggestion, individuals and groups do not have to reconcile themselves to being absorbed by the dominant ethos. They have a right to leaven it—a right, even a duty, to help shape it into a form more consonant with America's new position of leadership in the Western world.

No Second Act

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF NATHANAEL WEST. Farrar, Straus. $5.

By RICHARD L. SCHOENWALD

WEST DIED in 1940, killed at the wheel of his station wagon. He never saw an atomic blast on TV or at the movies; station wagons today have become bigger, shinier, and far more common. Because West was an artist, however, he won a look into the future, a prospect of that America now being categorized according to David Riesman.

Becoming an artist had not been easy. He had to battle the temptation to give in to posing in Paris in the twenties; he had to bear the endless hardships of earning a living in the twenties and thirties. The four novels reprinted here show that West struggled and triumphed: he got his vision down on paper.

That paper sold poorly when printed. Two of his novels, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* and *A Cool Million,* have hardly been read at all. Yet *A Cool Million* was republished recently in England, and West's other work, *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust,* have appeared as paperbacks. There is talk of a play being made from *Miss Lonelyhearts.* West's day at last is dawning.

The recognition grows that West wrote about something more than pseudo-surrealist characters inside the Trojan horse, a demented writer giving advice to the unloved, a bumpkin determined to act out all the Horatio Alger stories, a group of Hollywood grotesques. He had

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to write about something. He could not simply and starkly proclaim: here in America is a great emptiness, a vacuum sucking us all in and forcing us to die of spiritual bends. He did not tell, he showed. He pictured his characters journeying. Balso Snell gets nowhere in his ramblings; Miss Lonelyhearts reaches the Cross; Lemuel Pitkin finds a fatal piece of lead, not a pot of gold; those who swarm to Hollywood are left to torture themselves as they strike out in frenzy against the boredom they cannot escape or transform.

West's work belongs together. Images and turns of phrase carry over from one novel to the next. Beneath these similarities rests his great achievement, visible in all of his work. He sensed what Paul Tillich calls "the shaking of the foundations." Like an expressionistic artist, he saw the breaking up of life's surface, and in his prose he drew the fragments. He acted as a seismograph, a metaphor Tillich has used in speaking of the expressionists. He met reality at a deeper level, where, strange and frightening though it looks, it is real and cannot be denied. West's work forces the recognition to which, Tillich says, expressionist art drives: I know that street, but I hadn't seen it before.

The vogue for Samuel Beckett, the reprinting of C. G. Finney's *The Circus of Dr. Lao,* Arthur Miller's poetic modifying of expressionism, and the sway of abstract expressionism among painters today suggests that West's time has come. Scott Fitzgerald had to wait, too, and then he passed through a boom. Many parallels thread between the two, who knew each other: relatively small production; the marginality of their lives, as born Jew and born Irish Catholic; concern with sacrifice of the self, in Dick Diver and Miss Lonelyhearts; the journey to Hollywood and the mastery of it as a thinking writer; fascination with America's possibility, with what being American means, with what being human means; death on successive days; the feeling that there were no second acts in American lives.

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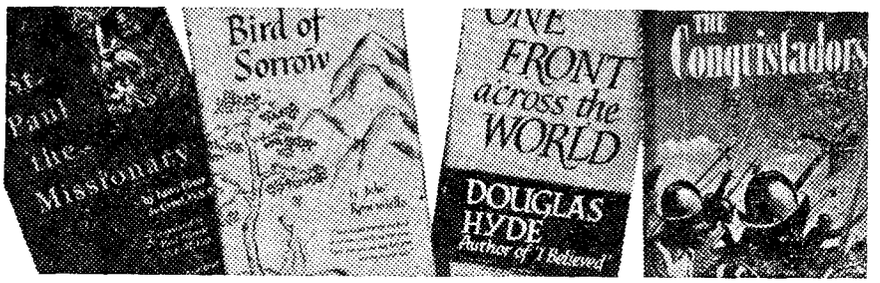

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The Use of Failure

FAR, FAR THE MOUNTAIN PEAK. By John Masters. Viking. $5.

By WILLIAM DUNLEA

THE PROLIFIC John Masters writes like a man put on his mettle by broad and highly charged themes widely favored latterly by authors of big adventure novels. *Far, Far the Mountain Peak,* his latest super-novel, with a robust itinerary stretching from the Matterhorn to the Himalayas, tells how an unscrupulous "climber" with a noble body becomes a mountaineer with a generous contemplative soul. It may be some indication of the over-ambitious nature of this tale that twenty years and nearly five hundred pages after he is introduced, the hero is a far less vivid personality than he was in the early pages.

Peter Savage is imperturbably British but no gentleman; something of a demigod to everyone around him, he is fired with a destructive sense of destiny which he obeys impulsively, driving himself and his worshipping friend Gerry, for whom alone he is not an ogre, to glory at any price. Although he will enter the Indian Civil Service and undoubtedly become Viceroy, he discovers the first self-assertive outlet when he witnesses a Cambridge fellow-student mount King's College Chapel; since the top is Peter's goal, why not start by scaling real mountains? It is clearly the speechless admiration which greets the student's feat that awakens Savage's interest in the sport, yet his motives and ends are soon being idealized by the author as selfless, however reckless the means.

We are not confined to the drama of mountaineering, for there is a legendary cast to our hero, who must be followed into more megalomaniac enterprises, such as the kindling of colonial reform in the subcontinent and attempts to influence military strategy in World War I. There is the winning of Emily and the achievement of symbiosis between their conflicting ideas of life; and always the problem of molding gentle Gerry, torn between

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Emily and Peter, each of whom wants to save him from the other. Both need him keenly, which is why he can never find himself, and both destroy him: he is destroyed as much by Emily's not always sisterly love and by Peter's not invariably benevolent domination as by his own confused love for them.

Here is a situation in itself so pregnant with drama that it would hardly need all these romantic backdrops to be realized. It acts as a counterplot hobbling an already erratic line of development. The climbing is an image of how dubious daring can attain to sober heights; and certainly there are many ironies in the symbolism of mountaineering. (One of the most intriguing of these derives from the inevitable pious protests over deconsecration of nature's sacred monuments by man, who is thus held unfit to attempt with epic hardship what apes might accomplish with ease; perhaps then man does not desecrate the virginal peak as much as himself.)

Unhappily there are times we cannot see the climbers for the overarticulated mountains. And then we have already been so exhausted by their trying life below that their exploits on the cliffs hold only a dim-focus relation to that life, and seem a diversion from it. In the second assault on Mount Meru Savage again meets failure, but this time he has learned that failure is usable. Where before he could only conquer, now he can love.

The physical power of *Far, Far the Mountain Peak* is not mean, yet one is too conscious of its bulk and it is not highly readable. In its massive and expert description of mountaineering it is handicapped by the paradox that the poetry and excitement of the climb catch the imagination with greater singleness of impression in uncluttered documentary form, or in a non-realist setting. Yet the ultimate enemy of its success is Peter Savage. For a realistic narrative, he is too strong an archetype, a veritable fugitive from Dr. Sheldon's catalyst category.

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Displaced Artist

WYNDHAM LEWIS. By Geoffrey Wagner. Yale University Press. $5.

By HORACE GREGORY

THE DEATH of Wyndham Lewis, age seventy-two, in London, on March 7th of the present year, seems to close one era of avant-garde art. As long as Lewis lived, his personality represented the living memory of London's Soho restaurants before World War I, of Cubism in interior decoration, of Georges Sorel's "Reflections on Violence," of Wilhelm Worringer's writings on art, of T. E. Hulme's military manifestoes on modern art with its "new *Weltanschauung*"—neo-anti-romanticism-neo-classicism—a "geometrical art," Hulme called it, and of Lewis's own (with the aid of Ezra Pound) "Vorticism."

At the very least Lewis's "portmanteau-man" career (the phrase is his) embraced many ideas, including painting and satire; at most—and this, even beyond the writing of an original novel *Tarr* (1918), and

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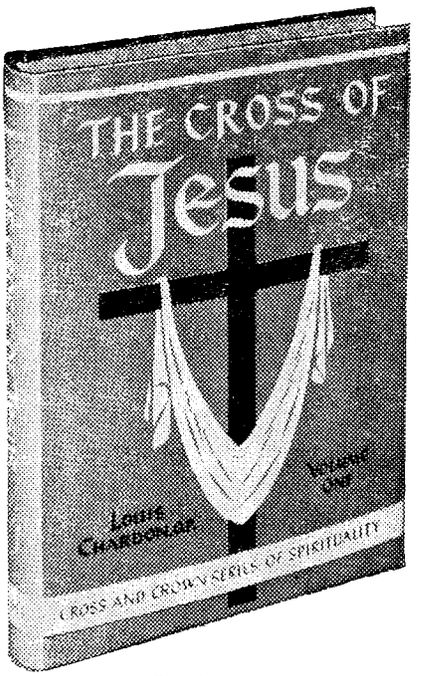

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a memorable book of short stories, *The Wild Body* (1927)—the creation of a singular character, Wyndham Lewis himself. So far, the presence of that character has been the subject of two books: Hugh Kenner's light-hearted, brilliant study *Wyndham Lewis* (1954) and Geoffrey Wagner's recent and far more serious thesis, *Wyndham Lewis: A Portrait of the Artist as the Enemy*. Mr. Kenner's treatment of Lewis was casual—an animated conversation about his subject—as though he had talked his book into a recorder within twenty-four hours and a rapid typist had transcribed it the following day. Mr. Wagner's book is more difficult to read, more rewarding in its flashes of insight, far more informative, more "academic," more ponderous in manner. In both books the figure of Lewis is restless and ungratified: an innate conservative waiting for counter-revolutions, a lover of energy, violence and order, an anti-romantic, romantic classicist—the temper of a Mario Praz. An artist practicing art against art, his passion was to strike out against established popular "commercial" taste in Britain, and against liberal opinion in the mid-thirties, to be the champion of Britain's enemy, Hitler.

Is it both irreverent and irrelevant to remember that Lewis was born on board a British ship of which his father was captain in the Bay of Fundy? I think not. Sometimes the accident of place of birth or the legend of it, takes on curious meaning to what follows after in a man's life. As artist, critic, satirist, novelist, journalist, Lewis was a "displaced" figure in British art. After one year at Rugby (according to Mr. Wagner) and a year at the Slade Fine Art School, he spent the next six years studying painting in Munich and in Paris; he saw something of the Netherlands and Spain —and in 1909 came back to England. Mr. Wagner is very right indeed as he observes how deeply Munich's Witzblatter affected Lewis's graphic art, as deeply as Paris became his university. Lewis, so it seemed, had broken through and with the tradition of British art.

The legend of his being born at sea, his self-made Continental education and his belief in both enough to account for Lewis's sen of otherworldliness from the Lo don world he saw, that sense whi drew him toward the orbit in whic T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Gaudie Brzeska, and later Eliot moved. I spite of Lewis's intellectual conve sion to abstractions and Cubism i the graphic arts, his painting, lik so much of British painting, held t "ideas" of painting rather than t the resources of paint and line with in themselves. Anyone who looks a Lewis's self-portraits, at his portrait of his friends, Pound and Eliot, wil find a center of interest in the sub ject, rather than in the aesthetic quality of the painting itself. How ever deeply Lewis was affected by European schools that came afte post-impressionism, he remained within the tradition of British "literary" art. He, of course, never yielded to the "sweetness" of commercial art; his "ideas" rejected the "smooth," the facile, the false compromises to meet popular appeal. His failure was a failure of talent, not of critical perception of what his painting might have been—but at this point, the anti-artist in Lewis comes forward in his painting, and as a scientist might solve a problem, so Lewis's forms take on geometric contours.

His extremism and his lack of political discernment led him to embrace Hitler, to demand a scientific, Germanic, anti-liberal pattern in politics with a show of force behind it. In this he shared the errors of many writers who in the early 1930's swung either to the Communist left or Fascist right. By 1939 he had to correct the errors of his political misadventures, to assert himself as the satirist of the age, the neo-classical conservative critic who in the fifties reached his apothesis in a book of short stories, *Rotting Hill*. His avant-garde days were over: his true accomplishments in prose remained in *Tarr* and *The Wild Body;* the time had come to weigh his value as a critic of the age.

Of the two aspects of his personality, artist and anti-artist, the anti-artist survived. He was the least gifted of a group of four—the other

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three were Joyce, Eliot, and Pound. Of this group he was the Thor, the hammer-thrower, the carrier of unpopular philosophies in World War I London. The manifestoes in his magazine *Blast* (1914) were directed against "sentimental hygienics" and "bourgeois Victorian vistas." As a "displaced" person in London the moment was his. He came with a lash against all and everything in British art. He revived and extended (as Mr. Wagner successfully proves) ideas which were at the center of Irving Babbitt's neoclassicism. Although (through *Tarr*) he was to advance the British "novel of ideas," he could not sustain, however much he wrote (or painted), the creative forces of his imagination. His longer satires, including *The Apes of God*, are dull, not in conception, but because the objects of his attack are of too brief a moment in literary and aesthetic warfare.

And Lewis, essentially, was a moral critic who had an extraordinary lack of faith in his moral position; he insisted upon being an "amoralist." He denied the forces larger than himself that might have sustained his imagination, the forces that D. H. Lawrence paid tribute to when he spoke of his "demon," that Eliot acknowledges in religion, that Pound expresses in his invocations to the pagan goddesses and muses. Lewis was "displaced" and bedeviled by an inhuman lack of humility. A courageous soldier in the literary and aesthetic warfare that bridged the years between 1910 and 1930, he could not write the book or paint the picture that could be submitted, and without self-defense, to his own genius. The anti-artist was too strong.

REVIEWERS

Joseph M. Duffy, Jr. is a member of the faculty of the University of Notre Dame.

Victor Ferkiss is a member of the political science department of Saint Mary's College, California.

Richard L. Schoenwald is the author of *Freud: The Man and His Mind*.

William Dunlea is a free-lance writer who contributes regularly to this magazine.

Horace Gregory is a noted poet and critic.

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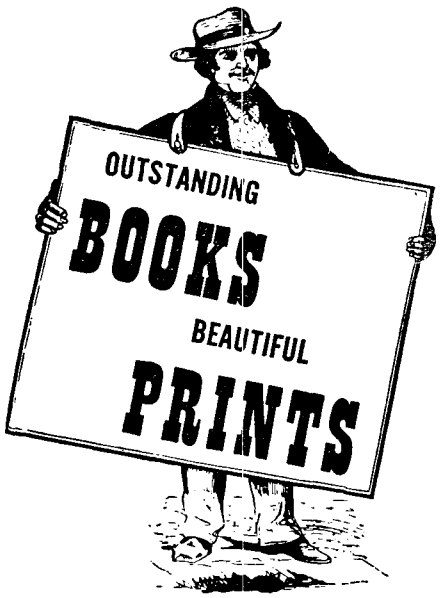

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